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Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance and Code: Consultation Analysis

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Contents

Executive Summary 2
1 Introduction 5
2 General Reflections 9
3 Views Towards the Guidance 18
4 Views Towards the Code 28
5 Welsh Language 37
6 Conclusions 40

Executive Summary

This report provides an independent analysis of responses to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) consultation which was open between May and July 2021. It sets out a summary of the views and perceptions of respondents towards the draft Guidance and Code.

Responses

In total, 866 consultation responses were received by a diverse range of individuals and organisations. These included children and young people, parents and carers, as well as practitioners. A further 41 people contributed their views within workshops. The consultation received 144 standard responses that shared similarities with other submissions.

Given the high prevalence of self-selection in responding to the consultation, the analysis should be considered to provide an indication of some of the views and perspectives held by the public towards the Guidance, rather than a definitive account of people and communities across Wales.

Key Findings

Across responses, both within formal submissions and through workshops, respondents raised a diverse range of views and perspectives. This including views towards the Guidance and Code itself, as well as general reflections including the role and potential of RSE within the curriculum.

General Reflections

Positive perspectives towards RSE where often informed by the understanding that developmentally appropriate provision would support and advance learner well-being. This included their social, emotional, and physical well-being, as well as developing a more accepting and tolerant environment for children and young people. Respondents also welcomed the greater emphasis on the rights of the child within the proposals.

Respondents, particularly practitioners, raised a range of practical considerations and challenges in effectively engaging with the new RSE curriculum. This included the importance of skills, expertise and confidence of practitioners in providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate provision. In order to support practitioners, high-quality training, guidance and materials were considered essential.

Negative perspectives tended to highlight the importance of learner well-being, however felt that the RSE was inappropriate and likely to exacerbate rather than address some of the challenges learners face. There were also concerns that RSE limited the freedom of religious expression, the rights of parents, and curtailing the rights of some groups, especially women and girls. Some respondents also found the inclusion of sexuality and gender problematic for a range of reasons.

Views Towards the Guidance

There were varying perspectives on how clear and valuable the overall definition of RSE was within the Guidance. Some found it clear and valuable, whilst others felt greater detail and specificity would be helpful, especially in understanding what the new RSE curriculum means in practice. This included greater precision around terminology, as well as more explicit reference to certain themes or matters that respondents felt should be included within teaching and learning.

There was general agreement with the principles outlined within the Guidance, especially amongst practitioners and senior leaders. This included the focus on well-being and safety, the rights and equity-based approach, the whole school approach, and the requirements for professional learning, amongst others. Some felt however that greater detail would again be helpful, including certain principles such as including parents and carers in the design of the RSE curriculum, and more explicit reference to specific topics, such as Violence Against Women.

Respondents, particularly some practitioners and senior leaders, found the Guidance clear and accessible. Others, however, felt that the Guidance could include clearer reference to certain expectations placed on settings, schools and governing bodies. Safeguarding was also a consistent theme, where respondents felt more explicit guidance would be valuable. Content and approach were other elements which respondents felt could be fleshed out in more detail. More negative perspectives tended to hold concerns around specific terminology or concepts, such as sexuality and gender, which they felt were either imprecise or inappropriate.

Views Towards the Code

As with the Guidance, respondents held varying perspectives on how clear and effective the Code was in communicating the mandatory elements of RSE. Whilst some felt it was clear and valuable, many felt that greater detail would be important in helping settings and schools. This would support more precise interpretations of the Code, and help practitioners to more effectively engage with the curriculum, especially around developmentally appropriate provision. Greater depth and precision was also felt to be valuable in engaging with parents and carers addressing any concerns, and in maintaining trust.

In terms of what was missing from the Code, respondents offered a suite of different suggestions, including specific topics they felt were valuable for learners to engage with. They collectively felt that more explicit reference would ensure that they are covered within the classroom. Suggestions included sexism and sexual harassment, the importance of peer support, promoting online safety, and the importance of marriage and family, amongst other themes. Overall, respondents felt that in order to be more effective, the Code required a greater level of detail than was provided within the draft.

Welsh Language

The consultation also asked respondents for their views on the RSE curriculum and its impact on and use of the Welsh language. This generated mixed responses. Some felt that it reinforced the importance of bilingual or Welsh language provision and would have positive impacts. Others, however, felt that is would have negative impact on the use of Welsh. These perspectives tended to also voice general opposition to RSE which they felt could undermine confidence in education more generally. More broadly, respondents highlighted the importance of access to Welsh-medium resources and support in effectively engaging with RSE.

Conclusions

Overall, the Guidance and Code were considered to be valuable, however greater level of detail was considered as important to ensure that RSE is effectively embedded in settings and schools across Wales. Underscoring these perspectives were a range of concerns, including in supporting practitioners to ensure developmentally appropriate provision at all times, and in maintaining the trust and support of parents and carers.

Apparent within responses were objections to the overall approach to RSE. Many responses were explicitly and implicitly informed by deeply held and broader a-priori, moral, or religious positions, or specific welfare concerns. These often stemmed from respondents' interpretation and perception of the general objectives and content of the new RSE curriculum. Some negative perspectives were based on misunderstandings of the objectives and content of the RSE curriculum. This was especially apparent around the specifics of what would be covered with younger learners.

Across all responses was the importance of the well-being of the learner. Both positive and negative perspectives on the new curriculum wished to promote and protect the well-being of learners. The inclusion of greater detail and depth in the Guidance and Code may help address some of the concerns expressed by respondents.

Navigating this Document

In communicating the findings of the analysis, this report follows the broad structure of the consultation document itself. Firstly, the report communicates some of the overarching themes expressed by respondents, before examining views towards the Guidance and Code in greater detail. A broad, overarching summary is provided in the Conclusions.

1 Introduction

This report provides an independent analysis of responses to the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) consultation which was open between May and July 2021. It sets out a summary of the views and perceptions of respondents towards the draft RSE Guidance and Code.

Background

The RSE Guidance and Code forms part of broader changes to education in Wales. The Curriculum for Wales was developed in response to a comprehensive review of curriculum and assessment arrangements. Drawing on the views and aspirations of people from across Wales, the new curriculum sets out a vision of the future for education. The new curriculum has been developed in partnership with a network of practitioners and schools, as well as broader individuals and organisations that support the education community.

RSE forms an important element of the new curriculum. Promoting and ensuring the well-being of all learners is at the heart of the new Curriculum for Wales. High-quality, developmentally appropriate RSE provision helps to create safe and empowering school communities where learners can grow, learn and develop positive healthy relationships for life. RSE includes, but is not limited to, learning about:

- Different types of relationships, such as familial, non-sexual and sexual relationships;
- The changing functions of the human body and how it influences behaviour and relationships;
- Social and cultural influences on representations of the body and relationships;
- and physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

Under the new Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, RSE is mandatory for learners aged 3 to 16 years of age in nurseries, non-maintained settings, primary schools, middle schools, secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Parents will no longer have the right to withdraw learners from RSE.

In supporting practitioners to plan, design and embed the new RSE curriculum in their schools, draft Guidance and Code were developed. Through a process of co-construction, practitioners were closely supported by educationalists, experts and other stakeholders in drafting the Guidance and Code. The objective was to provide practitioners with a valuable resource to help them to plan their RSE provision in the classroom and across the school.

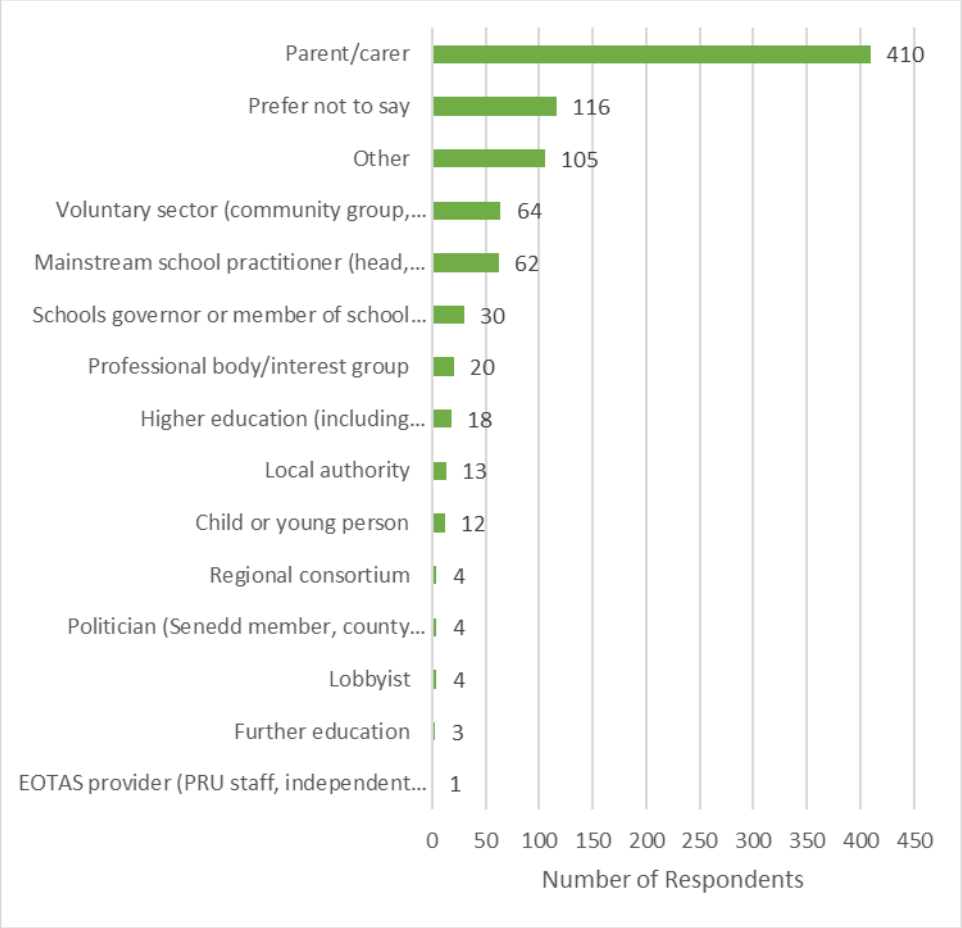
The Welsh Government were keen to explore the views and perspectives of the educational community towards the draft RSE Guidance and Code. Those with an interest in education, including parents, practitioners and school leaders, as well as broader stakeholders, were invited to contribute their views between May and July 2021. Responses were received online, via email, by post, and in person at workshops.

The feedback provided by respondents forms part of the co-construction process. The views and perspectives expressed by respondents have been fed back into the refinement of the Guidance and Code and has been considered by practitioners involved in its development. The refined Guidance and Code (subject to Senedd procedures) will form part of an update to the Curriculum for Wales Framework at the end of 2021.

Engagement with the Consultation

Respondents were invited to contribute their views on the draft Guidance and Code online, via email, by post, and in person at workshops. In total, 866 responses were received from a diverse range of individuals and organisations. This included parents and carers, members of the public and practitioners:

Figure 1: Engagement with the Consultation:



A range of organisations contributed their views towards the Guidance. This included public bodies, as well as interest groups with a view towards the Guidance.

A further 41 people contributed their views in workshops. This included senior leaders and practitioners from primary and secondary schools from across Wales, as well as parents and parent governors. The workshops centred on further exploring the views and expectations of participants views towards the Guidance and Code.

Campaign Responses

The consultation received 144 responses that shared similarities with other submissions. Drawing on a sensitivity analysis, these responses contained greater than 80 percent of their content that was identical to other submissions. These included responses citing specific organisations or interest groups, as well as individuals that had submitted more than one identical response. These responses tended to cite broader concerns with the overall approach to RSE set out in the Guidance.

The Representative Nature of Responses

In terms of understanding the balance of opinion, there is strong empirical evidence to suggest responses to the consultation **are not necessarily representative** of the views and perspectives of the broader public. The high prevalence of campaign responses suggests that there may have been coordinated deliberations surrounding the consultation, with some respondents encouraged to submit proforma text. The overwhelming majority of these responses expressed concerns with the approach. The consequence of self-selection and coordinated responses serves to increase more critical perspectives when considering the balance of opinion across responses.

There were also differences in the general sentiments expressed by respondents across different methods of engagement. It is apparent that the weight of opinion differed across online responses and in workshops. The majority of parents and carers in workshops, which were recruited from a range of schools and settings, believed the approach to RSE was relevant and important, and supported the overall approach. Conversely, the majority of parents and carers within online responses highlighted that they objected to the overall approach. This suggests that there may be differences in the substantive interpretation and perception of RSE between respondents to the consultation and the general population of parents and carers across Wales.

Further, there were substantive differences in viewpoints between different groups of respondents to the online consultation. Those responding as practitioners and senior leaders, for example, tended to be supportive of the approach, with many expressing broader practical considerations or requiring further detail. This is in contrast to many parents and carers who did not engage with the Guidance or Code itself but offered broader objections.

Analytical Approach

In order to understand the issues and themes raised by respondents, the Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill, an independent research organisation, to conduct an analysis of responses. The analysis set out to understand and map the range of views and perspectives held by respondents with regard to Guidance and Code.

In order to analyse the perspectives expressed by respondents, the authors of this report conducted detailed thematic analysis. This approach systematically examines each response and highlights the themes and issues that are raised. From this analysis, the team are then able to explore how widely held particular views and perspectives are.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations with regard to this analysis that are important to note. The respondents who kindly contributed their views and perspectives are not necessarily representative of the wider public views and perspectives. The high likelihood of self-selection increases the possibility that those who responded hold qualitatively different views and perspectives than are found amongst people and communities from across Wales more broadly.

Interpretation of the balance of opinion must also be considered in the context of the questions asked, as not every respondent answered all of the questions, nor did every respondent provide enough information to expand on their views accurately. In this respect, qualitative terms are only indicative of opinions that are relative to questions on the basis of those who responded. Therefore, they cannot be assumed to relate numerically back to the total number of people and organisations that responded, or to the educational community.

Taken together, therefore, this analysis should be considered to provide an indication of some of the views and perspectives held by people and communities towards the Guidance, rather than a definitive account of people and communities across Wales.

We now turn to outlining the substantive themes raised across responses against the substantive policy areas highlighted in the consultation.

2 General Reflections

Across responses, both within formal submissions and through workshops, respondents raised a diverse range of views and perspectives. This including views towards the Guidance and Code itself, which was the main focus of the consultation. Alongside this feedback, respondents also raised broader, general reflections, such as the role and potential of RSE within the curriculum, and the practical challenges of embedding it within teaching and learning.

Support for the Approach

Respondents, particularly practitioners and other public bodies, welcomed the overall approach to RSE outlined within the Guidance and Code. Within workshops, parents and carers on the whole positive about the new RSE curriculum.

Well-being of Children and Young People

Positive perspectives towards RSE where often informed by the understanding that developmentally appropriate provision would support and advance learner well-being. From these perspectives, RSE offers children and young people opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to safely and confidently explore their social worlds, and safeguard their emotional and physical well-being.

> *The document describes the breadth of RSE, and its importance in developing healthy and positive relationships. It is clear from the description that sexuality needs to be embedded in relationships education and that RSE is more than Sex Education, that it is about helping young people to grow and develop into well rounded citizens who understand and respect sexual diversity as well as having objective, factual, information about growing up, changing bodies and sexual reproduction. The description of RSE is clear for professionals working in the field.*

Local Authority

Within a workshop, a parent described how their children had witnessed domestic violence within the household. They wished for their children to grow up with an understanding and appreciation of respectful relationships, and that any form of abuse was not acceptable within a relationship. From their perspective, RSE was the single most important element of the new curriculum.

More positive perspectives were also often framed by concerns surrounding the information and ideas to which children and young people are exposed to outside of the classroom and away from the family. From these perspectives, respondents felt that RSE was important in providing balanced and impartial information that can protect and empower children and young people:

> *Young people are inundated with inappropriate images these days, including on their phones. It's pretty disturbing really. This is shaping how they behave too, and we really need to get in early and say that certain stuff is just not appropriate before they hurt themselves or someone else. They really need to know what respect looks like and that there are boundaries.*
>
> Parent and Carer

Another strand of thought was the potential for RSE to support the social, emotional and cognitive development of all children and young people. From these perspectives, RSE is not only concerned with communicating information, but also in developing a more accepting and tolerant environment for children and young people.

The potential positive impacts on learner well-being of developmentally appropriate RSE were recognised by a range of stakeholders, including those working in the early years sector:

> *[We] welcome that the importance of education within the early year's sector is recognised within the new curriculum, through the use of a learning continuum that spans from the age of 3 years. This Guidance document represents the first time that those involved in the education of 3-4 year olds within the non-maintained sector have been provided with a statutory requirement to deliver Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) to their learners. The inclusive nature of this movement of education within Wales has the opportunity to ensure all learners reach their full potential as well as supporting the Welsh Government's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) agenda.*
>
> Professional Body

Rights of the Child

Alongside promoting well-being, respondents also highlighted the importance of empowering children and young people. From these perspectives, respondents welcomed the greater emphasis on the rights of the child within the proposals. This included drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the development of the RSE curriculum:

> *Cytunaf - hoffi'r defnydd o Gonfensiwn y Cenhedloedd Unedig ar Hawliau'r Plentyn.*
>
> *I agree and like the use of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.*
>
> Parent or carer, translated from the original

> *Ensuring entitlements to learning about relationships and sexuality is an essential step to begin a much needed process in Wales that ensures all children and young people receive high quality opportunities to develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality.*
>
> Children's Commissioner

> *At the outset, it is important to reiterate our full support for the aims of introducing a new, mandatory, RSE curriculum that is rooted in principles of rights, equity, and inclusivity.*

Voluntary Sector Organisation

Established Practice

In more open conversations with practitioners within workshops, several respondents highlighted that the new curriculum broadly reflected existing teaching and learning in their school. From these perspectives, elements such as the importance and focus on healthy friendships and relationships were already established elements of teaching and learning. They also felt that the general sentiment of the new curriculum, including respect and recognition, were already reflected in the general ethos of a school. For these practitioners, the new curriculum reflected an evolution of teaching in learning rather than a wholesale change in approach. Some also viewed the RSE curriculum as providing important validation for the approach that they had taken within their school.

Overall Approach to the New Curriculum

More broadly, respondents also expressed support for the approach adopted within the Curriculum for Wales as a whole. This included elements such as the greater role for practitioners in designing the curriculum, and the greater focus on learner well-being. From these perspectives, respondents welcomed the freedom and flexibility outlined the Guidance to tailor the RSE curriculum to the needs of their school, their community and a particular group or cohort.

Practical Challenges

In thinking about the new curriculum in practice, respondents also raised a range of practical considerations and challenges in effectively engaging with the new RSE curriculum. These themes and issues in part go beyond the Guidance and Code itself to explore what the RSE curriculum would look like in terms of teaching and learning.

Skills, Expertise and Confidence of Practitioners

Respondents highlighted the importance of the skills, expertise and confidence of practitioners in providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate provision. Some understood the greater emphasis on cross-curricula learning and whole school approach would require a diffusion of responsibility for delivering RSE across more staff within a setting or school. Some senior leaders, for example, highlighted that they felt this would place some staff in a position where they were not comfortable or confident, including in discussing sensitive issues or in responding to questions from learners.

> *Some of my colleagues are hesitant about the RSE. Some have looked at it and felt that it could raise questions* [from learners] *that they are not comfortable in addressing. Its*

that they want to get it right, and are not familiar with the subject or how they should approach it. Supporting them will be key.

Senior Leader, Secondary School

RSE is a complex and broad topic. It is a specialist area of the curriculum that focuses on issues that can be sensitive and that can lead to teachers, students and parents feeling anxious, embarrassed and vulnerable. High-quality RSE is dependent upon having a well-trained workforce with the confidence to co-construct relevant content with children and young people. But research suggests that many teachers have not had adequate training to feel equipped and confident to deliver RSE lessons. This demonstrates how crucial it is for schools to have very clear and detailed RSE Guidance that they can consult to help them practically plan their RSE curriculum, giving them the information they need to feel confident in teaching this complex subject.

Voluntary Sector Organisation

Training and Continuing Professional Development

In building skills and confidence, respondents felt that high-quality training was essential. This was considered to be particularly valuable for newly qualified practitioners, or those new to teaching RSE. From these perspectives, training was valuable in helping practitioners engage with the themes and matters covered within RSE sensitively and effectively, and to distinguishing between developmentally appropriate provision.

Training will build confidence with all aspects of RSE and is essential to help give teachers the skills and the tools to deal with the more sensitive and controversial aspects of RSE.

Mainstream school practitioner

There were also respondents that felt bilingual training opportunities and broader support would be important in helping all schools, including Welsh-medium settings, to engage with the new curriculum:

It is critical that training, resources, exemplar materials are available in Welsh from the outset.

Mainstream school practitioner

Broader Support and Resources

Alongside training, respondents also highlighted the importance of broader support and resources. This included support from external organisations, such as community nurses, as well as written materials and other resources to support teaching and learning. From these perspectives, materials and resources could help practitioners to visualise the curriculum in

practice, and in generating ideas on how to approach the themes and matters outlined in the Code.

> *Mae Addysg Cydberthynas a Rhywioldeb effeithiol yn gofyn am arbenigedd, amser ac adnoddau arbenigol - hyn yw'r broblem ar hyn o bryd mewn ysgolion uwchradd yn enwedig. Yn aml mae staff uwchradd yn gorfod dysgu gwahanol rhannau o Addysg Rhyw heb hyfforddiant na chynhaliaeth jest am bod ganddynt amser rhydd ar yr amserlen ysgol! Nid yw hyn yn dderbyniol os ydych am wella'r ddarpariaeth addysg rhyw a ni fydd ei wneud yn statudol yn ddigon i godi ei statws. Mae'n rhaid cael hyfforddiant i staff ac adnoddau Cymraeg safonol fel y pecyn cynradd 'Tyfu i Fyny' a'r pecyn uwchradd seiliedig ar y DVD Sense.*
>
> *Effective Relationships and Sexuality Education requires specialist expertise, time and resources - this is the problem at present in secondary schools especially. Secondary staff often have to teach different parts of Sex Education without training or support just because they have free time on the school timetable! This is not acceptable if you want to improve sex education provision and making it statutory will not raise its status. Training for staff and standard Welsh language resources such as the primary pack 'Growing Up' and the secondary package based on the Sense DVD are essential.*
>
> Mainstream school practitioner, translated from the original

Limited Time

Within workshops, other practitioners highlighted the limited time that they had to deliver RSE within the school timetable. This suggested that some practitioners were conscious of what could realistically be achieved with learners in the time available. They felt that although they welcomed the breadth of the RSE curriculum, limited time could potentially constrain the extent and depth of themes and matters covered in class.

Variation in Teaching and Learning

A key concern emanating from responses was the potential for differences in approach to teaching and learning across settings and schools. They tended to highlight the importance of certain knowledge and skills that all learners should acquire through RSE provision. From these perspectives, the increased focus on subsidiarity and giving settings and schools greater ownership over the curriculum could lead to significant variation in practice, including both the themes and matters covered in class, and how content is delivered to learners. Respondents citing these concerns tended to advocate a more prescriptive approach, in which they outline the themes and matters that should be covered within teaching and learning.

Community Engagement

Maintaining the trust and support of parents and carers was also an important consideration for many practitioners. Within workshops, for example, senior leaders cited how broader debates and recent media attention had raised concerns from some parents and carers. This

placed extra responsibility upon schools and settings in reassuring parents and carers. From these perspectives, greater clarity and communication surrounding the proposals could be valuable in allaying concerns of some parents and carers.

Opposition to the Approach

Respondents raised a range of general objections to the approach contained within the new RSE curriculum. These tended to bring into question specific aspects of the proposals, or the general premise of the overall approach. These perspectives were mostly held by parents and carers responding to the online consultation, as well as broader individuals and organisations with an interest in the new RSE curriculum.

Well-being of Children and Young People

Respondents offering objections tended to also highlight the importance of ensuring the well-being of children and young people. These perspectives differed in how this could be achieved in practice, however. Respondents offering more negative perspectives tended to advocate shielding learners from the themes and matters under discussion. A major concern, for example, was the appropriateness of RSE provision, especially for younger learners:

> *The entire curriculum is developmentally inappropriate. No child, especially very young e.g as young as 3 years old, should be discussing their body with a teacher or anyone other than their parent.*
>
> Parent or carer

> *My child is 7 and shouldn't be learning about RSE at her age. She is too young to understand.*
>
> Parent or carer

Respondents also felt that engaging learners in themes and matters covered in RSE could exacerbate rather than address a range of well-being issues. This included the understanding that engaging learners in themes such as sexual health, sexuality and identity could encourage experimentation, increase confusion, and validate the views and feelings of children and young people. These respondents perceived issues such as the sexualisation of children and gender dysphoria as a matter for families to address, and should not be covered in school:

> *There should be parental consent before any RSE is taught in school. This will lead to premature pregnancies in young children where they are already exposed to online pornography. Some communities will object to this and might get offended by this approach this is morally and ethically wrong to decide what is good for pupils it's up to parents to decide. Who gave the state the right to decide?*
>
> Parent or carer

Freedom of Religious Expression

Another area of concern with the proposals centred on the balance between child rights and the rights to religious expression. This centred on the idea that some content within RSE was incompatible with specific beliefs or faiths. This included the understanding that RSE held a moral dimension, and that the primacy of family and religious beliefs should be upheld within the proposals but are currently not:

> *If this Code is considered to be a 'rights based RSE curriculum' then it must include the rights of any child of any faith to practice their religion and also respect the rights of families to provide spiritual direction to their children. UNCRC rights need to be explicit when mentioned otherwise educators may not be aware of them.*

Professional body/interest group

> *I feel that the rights of children of faith and their families are at risk of being undercut by a dictated moral perspective that they may not share. International rights and standards for children, parents, and religious freedoms appear to lack representation.*

Individual

Some respondents raised concerns about RSE and the potential impact on Faith Schools and communities of faith.

> *The Guidance needs to have wider and more inclusive, and more respectful relationship with faith communities. Especially those who have historical, spiritual beliefs that shape their response to these issues.*

Parent or carer

Protecting the Rights of Parents

Respondents also objected to the removal of the right to withdraw from RSE provision. Implicitly, these perspectives disagreed with the interpretation of Child Rights offered within the Guidance. These perspectives centred on the important role parents and carers hold in educating learners around sexual health and relationships. They also encompass more contemporary debates relating to problematisation of gender, sexual orientation, and identity. Again, from these perspectives, the primacy of the family should be upheld, which these respondents felt was lacking in the proposals:

> *Parents should still get a say if they want their child included in lessons involving a sexual nature/content.*

Parent or carer

Balancing Rights of Different Groups

Others also highlighted the importance of balancing the rights of different groups, including children and young people, their peers, and their parents or carers.

> *It is clear enough in many respects, but if a rights-based approach is adopted, it is not clear how schools will be able to explain how learners' rights should be balanced against the rights of others.*

Parent and carer

Within this theme, there was also the perception that promoting the rights of one group would come at the expense of another. Both implicitly and explicitly, this tended to centre on broader debates and reflections on the importance of protecting women and girls and not placing them at risk by advancing the rights of transgender people:

> *There is an inbuilt confusion in the replacement of the concept of sex by the term sexuality, which serves to ignore the contradictions implicit in different aspects of human rights and can result in the neglect of girls' need for safety and self-respect. Discrimination in one form can lead to inadvertent discrimination in another category. Protecting the whole range of potential vulnerable characteristics requires discernment which seems to be lacking in the detail addressed in this document.*

Parent or carer

Policy Capture

There were also concerns from respondents that the process of developing the new RSE curriculum had been unduly influenced by certain ideological positions or organisations. From these perspectives, the nature and direction of the RSE curriculum was being advanced by specific interests, ideas or lobby groups. They tended also to question the motives of the organisations and processes involved, including in advancing the rights of certain groups over others:

> *The main reason I'm completing this is the influence from* [an organisation]*, the organisation is a pressure group - outside of its original charitable aims and the Equality Act. Children are unsafe if* [the organisation's] *propaganda means safeguarding comes second place.*

Lobbyist

The Inclusion of Sexuality

Respondents also objected to the inclusion of sexuality within the new curriculum, which was felt to be problematic. This included the perception that RSE could expose children and young people to content that was inappropriate, especially for younger learners:

> *As a parent I am disgusted that the Welsh Government thinks it appropriate that sexuality has any place at all near my toddler's curriculum. Teaching children sexuality will sexualise them.*

Parent or Carer

Gender Critical Perspectives

There were also concerns from respondents around the perceived conflation of sex and gender within the overall approach to RSE. From these perspectives, there is a clear distinction between biological sex and gender, and that gender identity is an unscientific and harmful idea that is causing confusion amongst children and young people:

> *The inclusion of sexuality rather than sex seems designed to confuse, and downgrade information about the material reality of sex while foregrounding more intangible concepts such as identity.*

Parent or carer

> *We cannot have a curriculum totally founded in Queer Theory, such as this, an unscientific theory, founded in post-modernism, designed to erode boundaries. This is reckless and damaging. We cannot disregard safeguarding, biological sex, and provide no guidance as to the suitability of external providers. That would be failing our children. We cannot uncritically talk about transgender identities or medicine, when children are embracing 'identities' at an alarming rate, masking real mental health problems and harming their bodies before detransitioning. We must be balanced in this to avoid problems later on, and we mustn't seed this in young children. I have no issues in representing different sexualities, different families, different views, but there must be balance and we must teach facts above ideology.*

Parent or carer

The report now turns to exploring the substantive themes and perspectives raised by respondents towards the Guidance and Code.

3 Views Towards the Guidance

The Guidance includes draft statutory advice designed to communicate the expectations placed on schools surrounding RSE. Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to explore their views towards the definition and principles contained within the Guidance, and its structure and content.

Definition of RSE

The Guidance first seeks to communicate the parameters of RSE. Within a broader definition, it includes:

> *RSE should support learners to develop the knowledge, skills and values to understand how relationships and sexuality shape their own lives and the lives of others. Learners should be equipped and empowered to seek support on issues relating to RSE and to advocate for self and others.*

Consultation Document, pg. 7

Respondents were first asked whether they felt the broader definition contained within the Guidance was clear and effective.[1]

Clearly Explained and Well Defined

Many respondents found the overall definition within the Guidance clear. From these perspectives, there tended to also be explicit and implicit agreement with the general premise and orientation of RSE as outlined within the Guidance:

> *Having read through the Guidance, I agree that the definition of RSE is made clear.*

Parent or carer

> *I like the way it describes 'rights and equality' based RSE. It's clear that faith, beliefs, human rights and cultures relate to all aspects of RSE, including freedom, dignity and safety of young people – lovely. They are really clear and important sentences within the 'what is RSE' section.*

Regional Consortium

[1] Question 1: Do you agree that the explanation of the definition of RSE is clear?

Greater Detail

Others felt greater detail and precision would be beneficial. Respondents offered a range of suggestions on where further detail could strengthen the guidance. These included more explicit reference to certain themes or matters that respondents felt should be included within teaching and learning:

> *I agree that the definition is clear and supportive of developing healthy and safe relationships; it's appropriate to each year group; it is rights and equity based. There is, however, something missing with regards to the dignity of the person and of life.*
>
> Mainstream school practitioner

> *They appear to miss out the teaching of biology, including contraception. The outcome of sexual intercourse is reproduction and this isn't mentioned. Of course, there are many instances where reproduction is avoided and also many people have same sex relationships - these are important to explore, but the biological function of sex has not been covered!*
>
> Not disclosed

Respondents also highlighted the importance of greater clarity in supporting settings and schools to implement the new RSE curriculum:

> *[We] agree that overall, the definition of RSE is clear. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of RSE in supporting learners to develop healthy and positive relationships… In the definition section on page 7, the Guidance refers to how "learners can develop an understanding of how people's faith, belief, human rights and cultures are related to all aspects of RSE". There is a risk this could be misinterpreted by some providers without further clarification. It could be useful to re-emphasise the importance of teaching pluralistic views where RSE content may crossover with the teaching of values and ethics in the curriculum.*
>
> Organisation

Precision Around Terminology

Alongside greater depth, respondents also felt that some terminology could be clarified or made more accessible. This included terms such as pluralistic and sexuality:

> *Explanation and definition is wide, encompasses rights, different faiths, safety, links to new curriculum etc. Emphasis is on relationships, which is good. However, doesn't really make clear other aspects such as body changes during puberty, other biological changes etc. Some of the terminology (eg pluralistic) might be tricky to interpret – in theory and reality. The RSE policy says 'recommended' but surely this should be an expected part of RSE provision alongside inclusion in information for parents and carers – eg prospectus?*

Parent or carer

Objections Around Terminology

Others objected to certain terminology or concepts within the definition and glossary. Some respondents, for example, focused on gender terminology which they believed to be inaccurate and inappropriate. This included the use of terms such as gender and non-binary:

> *I think the Welsh Government needs to be clearer about its definition of sexuality and why it has decided to use this terminology, instead of the usual Relationship and Sex Education.*

Parent or carer

> *At no point is non-binary defined, nor is it explained that non-binary is not a protected characteristic in the equalities act. It's a belief not a fact."*

Professional body/interest group

> *The RSE is not neutral or factual in basis as it uses nonfactual terms like non-binary to promote gender ideology over sex education thus it is promoting a particular view. Later in the document this Violence against Women turns into Gender-based violence (GBV) a term which is not in the definition. Remove the word gender from this document.*

Parent or carer

Expanded Rationale

In more open discussions with practitioners and senior leaders in workshops, respondents felt greater detail around the rationale of the new RSE within the Guidance could be valuable in helping them to articulate the new curriculum, including to colleagues and parents and carers. This included communicating why RSE may be important in teaching and learning, including in promoting learner well-being and respect across the school community.

RSE Principles

The Guidance set out principles that should inform the design and delivery of RSE in settings and schools. These included, amongst others:

> *RSE should be part of a whole-school approach and effectively integrated and coordinated across the curriculum.*
>
> Consultation Document, pg. 11

Respondents were then asked for their views, including whether the principles were clear.[2]

Support for Principles

There was general agreement with the principles outlined within the Guidance, especially amongst practitioners and senior leaders. This was raised in workshops, where practitioners often felt the principles articulated a clear vision of the approach settings and schools should take RSE. This included explicit and implicit agreement with the whole school approach, greater emphasis on cross curricula learning, and the rights and equity-based approach.

> *Personally, it seems absolutely essential that these principles are in place and adhered to.*
>
> Mainstream school practitioner

> *Its important to discuss functional relationships with others and how we treat people with kindness and respect. It is a legal requirement to cover many of these topics.*
>
> Parent or carer

Greater Detail and Information

Many felt that additional detail and information would be beneficial to practitioners in acting on the new RSE curriculum. This included more specific reference to themes or matters within the principles but also more broadly across the Guidance and Code as a whole. From these perspectives, greater detail would be valuable in supporting settings and schools to understand and interpret the new curriculum:

> *We agree that the principles for embedding RSE are clear, and are generally in agreement with the breadth and content that they cover. We would like to commend that the principles are preventative, inclusive and positive, and incorporate a whole school approach. While the principles are of real value, at present there is a gap in the Guidance as to specific instruction exactly how schools and practitioners should implement the Guidance and develop and deliver their RSE curriculum. It may be that*

[2] Question 2: Do you agree that the principles for embedding RSE are clear?

further supplementary guidance is to follow; however, there are several areas where the Guidance should present a clearer, more detailed picture of what is required from teachers and schools. Given that research demonstrates RSE is typically delivered by staff with no specialist training, and who report feeling anxious and underprepared to deliver it, clearer guidance on developing the content of and implementing the curriculum are paramount.

Regional Consortium

Others felt that highlighting the important role of parents and carers should be more explicitly referenced in the principles. From these perspectives, greater parental engagement would ensure provision would be sensitive to the views and perspectives of parents and carers, including in maintaining confidence and trust:

We strongly agree that the principles for embedding RSE are made clear:

- *focus on well-being and safety*
- *the rights and equity-based approach*
- *to the whole school approach*
- *the requirements for professional learning*
- *deployment of specialist services and expertise*
- *progression.*

However, the Catholic Church acknowledges the role of parents as the primary educators of their children and the principles do not state explicitly that parents have a role to play in developing the RSE curriculum.

Mainstream school practitioner

Respondents also felt that more specific reference to themes and issues that they felt could be highlighted within the principles and across the Guidance. These included a diverse range of specific issues, including friendship, consent and abuse and neglect. From these perspectives, more explicit reference would serve to ensure that they are sensitively explored with learners:

Whilst knowledge about Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence is included, there is no emphasis on identifying the early warning signs and what to do that would be preventative. Lack of emphasis on consent, healthy relationships, hate crime or street harassment of women and girls and how to safely challenge it.

Mainstream school practitioner

We suggest that in the 'Principles of delivering effective RSE' section there is detail provided on providing learners with the skills and ability to recognise other types of abuse outside VAWG and domestic abuse and sexual violence, such as Child Sexual Exploitation and so-called 'honour violence'.

Health Care Organisation

It is positive to see that a set of key principles for delivering effective RSE has been included in the Guidance. The Guidance should clearly set out, not only the content of what should be taught, but how RSE should be designed, delivered, supported and embedded across the school and wider community. However, the principles that have been included are quite confusing. They are different to the 'principles for embedding RSE in the curriculum' that are already published in the Curriculum for Wales Framework 2020; and key concepts are missing such as rights, creativity, developmentally appropriate, holistic, and empowering… [We are also] concerned that a trauma-informed approach is not currently identified as a key principle for effective RSE.

Voluntary Sector Organisation

Some highlighted there is an important role for broader support in the delivery of RSE, and that more explicit reference should be included in the Guidance:

We regret that the role of school nurses, acknowledged in the 2019 draft Guidance, is not addressed or mentioned here. As noted in the 2019 draft, school nurses are a valuable source of professional advice and support for learners and can arrange for access to sexual health services. With comprehensive training and expertise, school nurses are primed to play a leading role in the delivery of RSE… The inclusion of who is responsible for delivering RSE would clarify any uncertainty and ensure that pupils and children are provided the highest quality RSE. The principles of delivering effective RSE as described in the draft Guidance are clear and welcomed, particularly the acknowledgement that RSE plays a part in promoting the wider health and well-being of children and young people including physical, mental and emotional health.

Professional Body

Structure and Content

Respondents were then asked whether they felt the overall structure and content of the Guidance was clear and accessible.[3]

Clear and Succinct

Respondents, particularly some practitioners and senior leaders, found the Guidance clear and accessible. They felt that it communicated a rounded understanding of the parameters of RSE, and gave valuable information on how to approach the themes and matters covered within the curriculum:

> *The Guidance strikes a clear balance between outlining for schools the purpose of RSE and what should be taught, while at the same time allowing for subsidiarity and schools being able to decide what is most appropriate for the context of their learners. This is clearly compatible with the spirit of the Curriculum for Wales.*

Professional Body

Clearer Expectations

Some felt that the Guidance could include clearer reference to certain expectations placed on settings, schools and governing bodies. This would support engagement with the curriculum, and the communication of the reforms to parents and carers:

> *The structure of the Guidance is clear and the content of the Code is clear. However, in Section 1 - Statutory Guidance, there is a lack of clarity in the following:*
>
> - *Audience (pg.6) there is no reference to governing bodies.*
> - *Phased withdrawal from RSE, this is confusing for parents. A timeframe for relevant year groups is required and how it would work in practice.*

School Governor

[3] Question 3: Do you agree that the structure and content of the Guidance clear?

Greater Detail on Content

A recurring theme across responses was the importance of including greater specificity within the Guidance and the Code. This included more explicit reference to a diverse range of themes or topics covered within RSE. From these perspectives, this would ensure that they would be covered in class, including in a developmentally appropriate way:

> *Would like to see more around consent and respect, particular with regard to pornography being more accessible and misrepresenting a healthy and safe sexual relationship.*
>
> School Governor

> *Strand 2 - adolescence 'The knowledge and understanding of how hormones continue to affect emotional and physical health through adulthood' - this is brilliant but should explicitly reference menstrual health and peri-menopause/menopause.*
>
> Parent or carer

> *This is an area that must be tackled in RSE: women's sex-based rights and sexual harassment and abuse. Children and young people need to understand the facts and realities of the situation in order to have safe boundaries and to be able to consent. I am very disappointed that pornography and prostitution are not mentioned. Both are gendered violence and Violence Against Women and Girls. Pornography and prostitution have negative effects on boys and men too. They must be addressed in RSE.*
>
> Mainstream School Practitioner

Some respondents also noted the importance of providing more specific reference and Guidance for engaging learners with Special Education Needs (SEN):

> *There needs to be more attention given to RSE for pupils with a disability. The guidelines overlook the fact that most pupils with special educational needs are in mainstream schools. As a person with Autism and other disabilities, I think there are many issues that make RSE difficult. For instance, confusion over boundaries, over different types of relationship, difficulty understanding sexuality and identifying their sexual orientation… Teachers should be aware of this and provide additional support, even when this isn't normally needed. For some disabled students, there is also a high risk of being taken advantage of or exploited in a romantic relationship.*
>
> Parent or carer

Greater Detail on Pedagogy

Alongside greater depth and detail in the 'what', respondents also asked for greater detail on 'how' RSE should be embedded into teaching and learning. This included greater use of exemplars and links to broader resources to help practitioners, particularly around implementing a whole school approach and embedding cross-curricula teaching and learning.

Greater Detail on Safeguarding

Another area which respondents felt could receive greater attention within the Guidance was around safeguarding. This includes the processes and procedures practitioners should follow in instances where information is disclosed by learners that undermines, or risks undermining, their well-being:

> *The content of the Guidance is clear, however, there is still scope for inequities in the delivery of RSE as a transparent example of how this is to be achieved is not clear. Although there is a reference to safeguarding, what this means in each year needs to be implicit. More detail is needed.*

Professional Body

Plain Language and Consistent Terminology

Some noted they had issues understanding the terminology used or there were inconsistencies across the Guidance. It was felt that greater precision and accessibility may be valuable in developing a shared understanding of the goals and content of RSE:

> *The content lacks clarity in areas and we would recommend using simpler clearer language throughout to make the document more concise and less open to interpretation. The Guidance lacks clear references to resources like the factual, evidence-based Abortion Factsheet that we have published together with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) to support schools to deliver accurate RSE lessons in secondary schools.*

Professional Body

Concerns Around Gender Terminology

Some cited concerns around specific concepts or terms used within the Guidance. These tended to reflect broader viewpoints around the perceived conflation of sex and gender:

> *The content is inconsistent and deliberately ambiguous. The Guidance is very unclear on the differences between sex, sexual intercourse and gender. The glossary of terms at the back, which contains unorthodox definitions, requires constant referencing to understand the new key concepts imposed. The opportunity provided by this Guidance for the replacement of 'sex' with 'gender' is fundamentally sexist. Women and girls stand to suffer the most from the disregard, if not political erasure, of sex.*

Parent or carer

The report now turns to highlighting views towards the Code.

4 Views Towards the Code

The Code of the RSE curriculum seeks to communicate the mandatory elements that should be included in teaching and learning. The Code includes a breakdown of the themes and matters covered in RSE, including:

- Developing and expressing identity and forming relationships;
- Understanding sexual health and well-being.
- Fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported.

Clarity of the Code

Respondents to the consultation were asked for their views towards the Code, including whether it was clear and appropriate.[4]

Clear and Effective

Some practitioners found the Code clear and effective in communicating the breadth of content and how they should be approached in a developmentally appropriate way. Some felt, for example, that the breakdown of developmentally appropriate provision was valuable and informative:

> *The RSE Code section provides clear and appropriate information for schools. The 3 strands provide contexts for learning. The table of contents for each strand, clearly expresses the focus for learning at each developmental stage.*

Mainstream School Practitioner

These respondents tended to also express explicit and implicit support for the themes and matters covered within the Code:

> *Young people need honest answers on this topic.*

Parent or carer

Greater Detail

Many respondents highlighted the importance of greater detail in the Code. Often, respondents felt that the Code was very high level, and that greater specificity would be valuable in determining the precise focus and extent of themes and matters covered within RSE. This would support more precise interpretations of the Code, and help practitioners to more effectively engage with the curriculum:

[4] Question 5: Do you agree that the RSE Code section of the Guidance is clear and appropriate?

> *There is broad agreement that the RSE Code section is clear and appropriate. Some local authorities would however recommend the Guidance is developed further to avoid any misrepresentations in this sensitive aspect of the curriculum. Prototype schemes of learning or learning journey examples, as provided in the Religion, Values and Ethics Guidance, could help support practitioners in developing a better understanding of the progression of each strand.*

Local Authority

Some felt that the age ranges were quite broad and could encompass a diverse range of learner needs, perspectives and development. This was especially apparent from secondary schools, where it was felt the range of learner development could be broad, including within and across year groups. From these perspectives, greater detail and Guidance within the Code would be valuable in determining what and how to teach in a developmentally appropriate way.

> *We appreciate the challenge and complexity of encompassing what is important about RSE for all learners ages and developmental stages in three statements. The three broad strands/stages relate well to each of the three statements and cover important aspects relating to RSE. However, because of the broad nature of the three statements, the content set out in the three broad strands is very generalised. In order to give real meaning to the content there needs to be more detail, to expand on these headings and unpack what is meant for each of them. With such broad, overarching headings, there is a risk that topics will not be covered in sufficient quality, breadth and detail and important content might be missed.*

Higher Education Institution

Similarly, respondents felt that greater clarity and specificity within the Code would be valuable alongside broader training, resources and support:

> *We agree, with the caveat that professionals involved in delivering the mandatory part of the RSE Code will be able to make adaptions and differentiate according to the developmental needs of the learner. However, we feel that these stages could be open to interpretation. The stages would benefit from further guidance, comprehensive professional learning, exemplar schemes of learning and endorsed teaching materials. This would improve consistency and increase the confidence of practitioners delivering RSE.*

Local Authority

Links to the Broader Curriculum

Respondents felt that more explicit links to other elements of the curriculum would be valuable to practitioners. This would be beneficial to those wishing to explore embedding greater cross-curricular learning opportunities:

Practitioners should also look for opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in all the other Areas. For example, there is a clear inter-dependency with the biological and technological aspects of the Science and Technology Area and the complex nature of human societies within the Humanities Area.

Professional Body

Clearer Terminology

Some respondents noted a need for clearer definitions for some terms to ensure consistent interpretation of the content and themes by all settings and schools. This included

Currently the document mentions 'strands' 'themes' 'matters', seemingly interchangeably (p13). Greater clarity of language is needed to help teachers navigate this guidance document within the context of the CfW documentation and guidance.

Regional Consortium

Inappropriate Terminology

Some felt that the Code included terminology or concepts that were inappropriate and inaccurate, such as the perceived conflation of sex and gender, and the focus on identity:

I'm concerned about the phrasing 'Developing and expressing identity'. Children don't need to develop an 'identity', and the word 'identity' suggests that they should label themselves in some way and live up to that 'identity'. Children should develop a sense of self and be comfortable with themselves and their personality, but they do not need to 'develop and express' an identity. Children do not need to label themselves with regards to their sexuality or gender and they don't need to 'express an identity'. They need to express themselves and be comfortable with themselves. I think this is an important distinction.

Parent or carer

In the section about RSE themes, you again use gender, this time linked with sexuality which you use as an umbrella term for "sexual orientation, gender identities and roles, sex, reproduction and intimacy." By pushing these together you are missing the importance of sexual orientation which is based on the sex of people, not on their gender identity, i.e. suggesting that homosexual people should be attracted to someone who is the opposite sex but presents as having the same gender (stereotype) presentation removes the hard won fight for their rights to same sex relationships. It also infringes on the bodily autonomy of individuals by pushing something that is not based on established science but is simply a theory put forward by a social scientist.

Parent or carer

Content Appropriate to the Learner

Within the three themes that should be included within RSE provision, the draft Code set out greater detail on content that is appropriate to the learner. The Code aimed to communicate statements of learning that reflect the building blocks of progression from early development through to adolescence. Respondents were asked whether they felt the content encompasses what is important across RSE.[5]

Agreement with the Code

There was explicit agreement with the general premise and content of the draft Code from respondents, particularly practitioners and senior leaders. This included the breadth and focus of the themes highlighted by the Code:

> *Broadly agree that the RSE code encompasses what is important for learners at the different age and developmental stages.* [Important to consider] *planning: correspondence between phases and across disciplines. Parents* [should be] *involved in the planning of RSE.*
>
> School Governor

Greater Detail

Many respondents cited that they felt greater detail and specificity within the Code around developmentally appropriate provision would be beneficial. This was often based on the perception that the statements within the Code were very high level. Whilst many agreed with the importance of the statements, they felt it was difficult to visualise in practice how they could be introduced into teaching and learning. This perspective was driven be a range of issues and concerns, including the importance of giving more detailed guidance to those who may be less familiar with the themes and matters covered in RSE.

Monitoring and Vetting Resources

Some respondents felt that resources and support were valuable in engaging with the RSE curriculum, including in embedding it in teaching and learning. From these perspectives, the lack of specificity made other resource and guidance much more valuable. However some felt that this would present challenges, especially in ensuring the suitability and effectiveness of materials and support.

[5] Question 4: We propose that the content set out in the three broad stages of the Guidance will become mandatory as part of the RSE Code. Do you agree that they encompass what is important about RSE for all learners' ages and developmental stages?

> *Suppliers of materials should have their materials inspected, audited, and badged as being suitable. All materials used should be available for parents/guardians to inspect. Parents should be able to observe lessons to ensure that the correct materials are used and that children are not served up ideologies which are adverse to their developmental well-being.*
>
> Parent or Carer

Maintaining the Trust of Parents

A number of respondents expressed that greater detail within the Code would be valuable in understanding what would be covered with learners. This was felt to be beneficial to practitioners, who wished to be on firmer ground when communicating with parents and carers. This was especially apparent in more open conversations with practitioners and senior leaders in workshops. Some felt that more detailed guidance would be valuable in dialogue with parents and carers.

Similarly, some parents and carers, including in workshops, suggested greater detail would be valuable in reassuring them, and addressing any concerns or misconceptions surrounding the curriculum. One parent or carer that had heard that the new curriculum would introduce masturbation to learners in primary school, was more positive towards the new curriculum after a short explanation of the content and objectives of the new curriculum. In this sense, lack of specificity was allowing misconceptions to arise around the precise focus of provision.

> *When will the contents of this be published for parents? I think we should see exactly what is in the content.*
>
> Parent or carer

General Opposition to the Code

There was also opposition to the general sentiment and focus of the Code. These included a diverse range of issues and concerns, such as sexuality and gender.

> *The outcome of this curriculum will sexualize children and make them more sexually active from a younger age than before. If you put a mandatory subject like SEX EDUCATION and deliver it to children from the age of 3 it will manipulate them to think heavily about that subject.*
>
> Parent or Carer

Missing Elements

Respondents where then asked if there were any missing elements from the Code.[6] Respondents offered a suite of different suggestions, including specific topics they felt were valuable for learners to engage with. They collectively felt that more explicit reference would ensure that they are covered within the classroom.

> *The "broad strands" are extremely patchy, missing out important information such as:*
>
> - *staying safe including from grooming*
> - *sexual harassment*
> - *sexism*
> - *sex discrimination*
> - *illegal and prescription drugs*
> - *female genital mutilation*
>
> School Governor

In addition, respondents also highlighted other potential topics they felt should be covered in the Code.

Peer Support

Some suggested that encouraging and fostering peer support could be valuable, and that this should be more explicitly referenced within the Code:

> *I think what has been outlined is good especially the inclusion of diverse relationships. I do, however, think there needs to be more on how to support one another. How to access support is included but a focus on peer support is not. This is very important as many young people struggle with body image issues and being secure in their gender and sexual identity, causing them to struggle to tell their friends and their peers.*
>
> Child or young person

Online Safety

Another key theme included the importance of ensuring that learners were safe online, and that this should be explored in more depth within the Code:

> *The mandatory elements of the RSE code appear to incorporate what is necessary to support learners develop and achieve the four purposes of the curriculum and reflect a rights and equity-based approach. However, children and young people in Wales are growing up in a complex world, where information is readily available online, which*

[6] Question 6: Do you agree that the mandatory elements of the Guidance (the RSE Code) are the right ones? Is anything missing that should be included?

presents both challenges and risks. Strand 3 – Fostering safety and respect, being valued and supported – would benefit from a greater emphasis on the challenges of the digital world. The phrase "including online" should be strengthened or addressed more directly.

Professional Body

Marriage and Family

Others wanted to see more on the important role of marriage and the family:

They place insufficient emphasis on the value of marriage and family life, both in themselves and in ensuring a firm basis for the health of society in general. They also reflect a bias towards so-called diversity, at the expense of more traditional views of marriage and the family which are still held by a large percentage of the population. They tend to marginalise moral considerations and the role of parents.

Parent or Carer

Menopause

Respondents also highlighted more explicit engagement with menopause within the Code:

Menopause learning needs to be mandatory as well. Allowing schools to manipulate and adapt on an individual basis may mean that some areas are possibly missed or not addressed in enough depth. Understand new ways of learning puts a lot of emphasis on school staff but many have to do this in their own time and any time given is not long enough to be thorough.

Mainstream School Practitioner

Safeguarding

Safeguarding was again raised as an important element that was missing from the Code and the Guidance more generally:

There is a total absence of safeguarding principles and practices, or any links to relevant child protection resources and guidance. The nature of RSE often leads to disclosures. Schools must be prepared for this with appropriate and comprehensive guidance. It is extremely worrying that this information appeared in earlier versions, but safeguarding and child protection information has now been removed.

School Governor

Effectiveness of the Code

Respondents were then asked whether the Code offered relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RSE.[7]

Positive Perspectives

Some felt that the Guidance and Code were useful documents that supported their understanding of RSE. This was confirmed in more open discussions with practitioners, particularly those more experienced with RSE, who felt that the Code was valuable and informative. From these perspectives, the Guidance and Code were effective in articulating the statutory duties on settings and schools, and in engaging with the curriculum.

> *This document is useful for experienced teachers who are able to compare and contrast previous curriculum Guidance.*

Mainstream School Practitioner

> *Teachers will need to be aware of the RSE Guidance (Section 1) and Code (Section2) as well as the Areas of Learning and Experience, in particular Health and Wellbeing. The references to content, specialist expertise, ways of engaging with families and communities and the glossary will be useful.*

Regional Consortium

Greater Detail and Guidance

Many respondents, however, felt that greater detail and guidance would be important in understanding and acting on RSE. This included within the Guidance and Code itself, but also in conjunction with broader materials, exemplars and training made available to settings and schools.

> *I think what is there is well written and clear. I might personally have gone further in some of the descriptions, such as in the table of building blocks.*

Mainstream School Practitioner

Broader Support

Respondents also felt that broader support, including from external providers, would be valuable. Some felt that it would be important to verify the content of the provision to ensure that it is appropriate and effective:

[7] Question 7: Do you agree that the Guidance offers relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RSE?

Specialist services must be involved to help teachers, as well as comprehensive training packages. You need to decide who will provide this support and ensure any support is not biased and not ideology-based but factual and neutral. Any service providers must be aware of the law regarding the Equality Act 2010… Relevant resources, both online and printed, should be produced or referenced to make teachers' jobs easier. They shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel. Again, these resources need to be factual, evidence-based and neutral - not based on ideology or belief. They must be age-appropriate and based on safeguarding children.

5 Welsh Language

The consultation also asked respondents for their views on the RSE curriculum and its impact on and use of the Welsh language.[8]

Impact on Welsh Language

Positive Impact

Some felt that the new RSE curriculum would be positive for the Welsh language. This tended to centre on the importance of rounded Welsh-medium provision:

> *Effeithio yn gadarnhaol ar yr iaith Gymraeg - gan rhoi gwerth ar ddysgu yn eich mam iaith.*
>
> *Positive effect on the Welsh language - as it puts value in learning a subject in your mother tongue.*
>
> Public Sector Organisation, translated from the original

> *Wrth ddatblygu eich holl darpariaeth addysg yn y 2 iaith mae hyn yn rhoi cydbwysau a chyd werth i'r 2 iaith"*
>
> *By developing the whole educational provision in the 2 languages you are giving equal value to both languages.*
>
> Mainstream School Practitioner, translated from the original

No Impact

Some felt that RSE would not have a discernible impact on the Welsh language:

> *I don't believe RSE education would have an impact on the Welsh language one way or another as long as the materials are produced equally for both Welsh and English medium educational settings*.
>
> Mainstream School Practitioner

[8] Question 8: We would like to know your views on the effects that the RSE draft statutory Guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on :i) opportunities for people to use Welsh ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Negative Impact on Welsh language

Others, however, felt that is would have negative impact on the use of Welsh. These perspectives tended to also voice general opposition to RSE. The introduction of RSE, from these perspectives, may serve to undermine confidence and engagement with provision in general, and Welsh-medium provision in particular.

> *Some parents who do not feel their children are safe in Welsh schools as a result of this political curriculum will not be sending their children there. Therefore they will not be learning Welsh unless it is already in the home. This compulsory RSE indoctrination has the potential to alienate children and their families from schools, communities and the Welsh language. The risk of conflict with parents, carers and concerned stakeholders is significant.*
>
> Parent or carer

Opportunities to use the Welsh Language

No Barriers to Bilingual Provision

Some respondents noted that as long as bilingual materials are provided to schools then there should be no barriers to effective bilingual or Welsh-medium RSE provision:

> *I see no reason why this curriculum cannot be taught in Welsh, English and bilingually as appropriate to the child's needs and the school circumstances.*
>
> Mainstream School Practitioner

Importance of Welsh Medium Resources and Support

Others highlighted the importance of the provision of Welsh-medium resources and support. This included guidance, resources and training to ensure that practitioners can effectively engage with the curriculum in Welsh.

> *It is vital that proficient Welsh speaking RSE professional and providers from North and South Wales are utilised and consulted with in order to avoid any negative effect on the Welsh language.*
>
> Mainstream School Practitioner

> *Teachers of Welsh medium schools are constantly having to translate RSE resources into Welsh. To avoid a negative effect on the Welsh language, all relevant resources must be available bi-lingually. It is imperative that proficient Welsh language RSE training providers and resource developers are involved at the outset to avoid any negative effect. The North and South Wales dialect should also be a consideration to ensure resources are suitable for all schools in Wales and avoid any negative effect on their use.*

Mainstream School Practitioner

Ensure all relevant resources are available bi-lingually. Ensure that proficient Welsh language RSE training providers are used to train school staff. Ensure that proficient Welsh language RSE resource developers are used when developing any resources. Ensure that the North and South Wales dialect is taken into consideration when developing RSE resources in order to ensure they are suitable for all schools in Wales.

Mainstream School Practitioner

Challenges Around Translation

Others raised challenges around translation of complex ideas and concepts contained within the RSE curriculum into Welsh. These perspectives tended to be cited by those expressing opposition to the perceived focus on gender and identity within the new curriculum:

Quality of translation across languages is very important in developing understanding of complex ideas. Both Welsh and English are living languages which are being ideologically misused in this context where religious & social ideals are being used to deny scientific fact. Religion should not be given the opportunity to override the freedoms of modern society. Personal and social education should not be used to ostracise children who need time to adjust to learning new ideas and integrate them into their social relationships safely.

Parent or Carer

6 Conclusions

Overall, the Guidance and Code were considered to be valuable, however greater level of detail was considered as essential to ensure that RSE is effectively embedded in settings and schools across Wales. Underscoring these perspectives were a range of concerns, including in supporting practitioners to ensure developmentally appropriate provision at all times, and in maintaining the trust and support of parents and carers.

Across responses from teachers, practitioners or senior leaders, both in online submissions and focus groups, there was broad support for the general approach for RSE in the curriculum. This included the importance placed within the Guidance on the rights of the child, and the whole school approach it espouses. There was also general agreement towards a key rationale underscoring the reforms, namely the importance of updating and refreshing teaching and learning around sex and relationships. This was in recognition of the importance of supporting children and young people to confidently and safely navigate contemporary social life.

Apparent within responses were objections to the overall approach to RSE. Many responses were explicitly and implicitly informed by deeply held and broader a-priori, moral, or religious positions, or specific welfare concerns. These often stemmed from respondents' interpretation and perception of the general objectives and content of the new RSE curriculum.

More critical perspectives offered within the consultation tended not to engage with the Guidance and Code itself, but objected to the approach as a whole. Many offered instead a range of concerns. Whilst diverse in substantive origin and orientation, negative perspectives tended to link back to two overarching areas of concern:

- That the proposed approach is inappropriate for learners, especially for younger children. From these perspectives, respondents often raised the disconnect between the values held by parents and carers and the perceived understanding of RSE content and focus, especially surrounding sexual orientation.

- Further, a key theme was the perceived focus on gender and identity within the curriculum, which was considered problematic. Apparent within these perspectives was the perceived shift away from biological and 'fact-based' teachings of gender, towards relativist interpretations that openly accept and by default encourage difference.

Some negative perspectives were based on misunderstandings of the objectives and content of the RSE curriculum. This was especially apparent around the specifics of what would be covered with younger learners. Evident within responses was the perception that younger learners would receive sexually explicit content as a result of the new curriculum, for example. Misunderstandings also extended to the precept of age-appropriate provision, where

respondent's perceptions of what that meant in practice are not reflective of the Guidance or the general orientation of the new curriculum.

Across all responses was the importance of the well-being of the learner. Both positive and negative perspectives on the new curriculum wished to promote and protect the well-being of learners. The inclusion of greater detail and depth in the Guidance and Code may help address some of the concerns expressed by respondents.

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